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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000259

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL

1E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL VM HUMANR

SUBJECT: DR. QUE UNDER DETENTION

11. (SBU) Poloff visited the home of democracy activist Dr. Nguyen Dan Que on March 18 to confirm reports of his arrest received earlier that day. Based on the information originally provided by his brother in the U.S., and now confirmed by his wife, it appears that a large number of security officers hustled Dr. Que off to the local District 5 police station at 8:00 p.m. on March 17. He was arrested in front of his home, without being given an opportunity to go inside and retrieve additional clothing or medications. The arresting officers on the scene accused him of being on his way to an Internet cafe to publish criticisms of the GVN. Police returned to Que's home in force just before midnight the same day to search through his possessions. They removed his computer and cell phone, as well as assorted documents and written materials. Several officers took still photographs and video footage during the search.

12. (SBU) The long, unlit alley leading to Dr. Que's home appeared largely deserted when Poloff arrived at 7:30 p.m. on March 18. Dr. Que's wife opened the door only long enough to quickly usher Poloff inside. She appeared quite nervous and agitated throughout the conversation. At one point, she sent a relative out to photocopy the investigation report signed by the police and family members upon completion of the search. Post now has a copy of that report. Dr. Que's stepson had been brought to the police station at 1:30 a.m. that morning to sign the report and to obtain a legal record of what had been taken from his home. Dr. Que's brother surmised that Dr. Que must have characteristically insisted on the police producing a legal document to entitle them to search. Fortunately, the stepson was able to see Dr. Que at the time he signed the document. Police later informed Dr. Que's wife that her husband had been moved to the municipal jail in District 1, and allowed her to send clothing and medicine. Dr. Que's wife did not know why the authorities had decided to detain her husband at this time. She speculated that it must have had something to do with one of his interviews with the foreign news media, including Radio Free Asia. His brother thought it might have something to do with Dr. Que's recent criticism of GVN claims of a free press in Vietnam.

13. (SBU) During the conversation, Dr. Que's wife made clear that she and her husband would appreciate any representations by the Consulate General, in the hopes of gaining his release or improving his treatment. She expressed concern that he had not been feeling very well before this latest incident. (Post note: Dr. Que is an endocrinologist and has been self-medicating an ulcer and kidney ailments for a long time. His brother sends him medication from the U.S. from time to time. End note.) Post will follow up with the relevant local authorities.

14. (SBU) Comment: Dr. Que and his family have occasionally raised exaggerated alarm bells in the past, but this incident would seem to be the real thing. Just why the GVN would choose to raise the stakes with a well-known figure like Dr. Que at this time is not clear, given that he has been consistently outspoken in his views over a period of time. It may be as simple (naive?) as his brother's assumption that hardliners in the GVN hope the USG would be otherwise distracted by events in Iraq.

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